

Making a fuss about LGBT: The never-ending moral panic

Why does the public outcry surrounding the so-called "LGBT culture" in Indonesia persist so relentlessly? Is the existence of citizens with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer orientations genuinely a threat to the nation? The answer is clear: What threatens Indonesia is not the private sexual orientation of its citizens, but the pervasive corruption within its ruling class.

If there were public demonstrations akin to Christopher Street Day festivals or provocative displays of rainbow flags, public pushback might be understandable given local norms. But in Indonesia, LGBT individuals are ordinary citizens integrated into daily life. When meeting someone, one does not inquire about their sexual orientation. Why, then, are people with nonnormative sexual orientations framed as a threat to national culture?

Sexual identity is not a deliberate choice. Just as young boys do not choose for their voices to deepen during puberty, sexual orientation is a natural development discovered as an individual matures. If one believes human nature is divinely created, it follows that diverse sexual orientations are part of that creation. What God has created must be accepted.

An estimated 9 percent of the global population experiences a

sexual orientation different from the heterosexual norm. Realizing during adolescence or young adulthood that one's sexual attraction differs from that of one's peers can be a daunting experience. Scientific consensus has long established that sexual orientation is not something an individual can alter at will; it is neither a disease nor a defect, but a natural human variation.

For Catholics, a significant theological shift occurred in 1979 when Pope John Paul II affirmed that homosexuality, attraction between people of the same sex, is neither a disease nor a conscious choice, but a condition of nature. Consequently, he noted, homosexuality in itself is not a sin. LGBT individuals possess the exact same human dignity as heterosexual citizens.

It is reasonable to expect that LGBT individuals adapt to the public norms of the society in which they live. In Indonesia, public displays of affection between men and women remain rare and are generally confined to married couples. Thus, LGBT citizens should respect local public decorum and refrain from overt public displays of intimacy.

However, what two consenting adults do in private is entirely outside the purview of the state. When two adults share a private



Insight

Franz Magnis-Suseno

Jakarta

A Jesuit priest, philosopher, and former chairman of the Driyarkara Institute of Philosophy in Jakarta

residence, the state has no right to monitor, restrict or police them. Neither do local neighborhood leaders, community elders or religious figures. Private life is a fundamental human right, as recognized in Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy."

To be sure, the state has a legitimate duty to establish protective rules for vulnerable individuals, such as minors, persons with mental illness and those in dependent relationships. The state must actively prevent all forms of violence and coercion, and it maintains the authority to regulate public spaces, dress codes in public facilities or operations of commercial boarding houses and hotels.

Yet, the state lacks any legal or moral right to prohibit consenting adults from sleeping together or sharing a household. Two women or two men may choose to establish a life together. There may be localized exceptions, such

as traditional rural communities where customary norms regarding cohabitation carry deep ethical weight and ought to be respected without deliberate provocation. But elsewhere, the private living arrangements of two adults are strictly their own affair.

The late Pope Francis offered a notable perspective on this topic. Though the Catholic Church is not known for flexible sexual ethics, Francis gained international attention in 2013 when, asked about gay priests, he famously responded: "Who am I to judge?"

Later, in a 2019 interview, he stated: "Homosexual people have the right to be in a family. They are children of God [...] What we have to create is a civil union law." He advocated for registered civil partnerships—a legal mechanism by which the state officially recognizes that two individuals share a household, without redefining religious marriage.

Regarding the question of same-sex marriage: In several liberal democracies, demands for full

legal equality have led to the recognition of same-sex unions as marriage on par with traditional marriage. However, this demand lacks a foundational basis.

For tens of thousands of years across human history, societies have regulated the union between men and women through various institutions, whether monogamous, polygamous or otherwise. Why? Because heterosexual relationships involve reproduction, which secures the most fundamental interest of any species: continuity. Humanity survives only if children are born and raised into mature, functional members of society. Because a child requires roughly 18 years of care, education and socialization within a stable family unit, the relationship between men and women has always held unique protection in law, custom and moral norms.

Society does not share that same institutional interest in same-sex relationships. Redefining traditional marriage conflates two fundamentally different social functions. Distinction is not inherently discrimination; it is simply the recognition of functional differences. Demanding that same-sex partnerships be strictly equated with traditional marriage is an ideological stance.

What same-sex couples legitimately require is legal protection,

security and equal rights regarding property and partnership, outcomes effectively provided by civil union frameworks.

Ultimately, state attention is currently misdirected. The government should not concern itself with two consenting adults choosing to live together. Instead, it should focus its resources on combating the rampant sexual abuse, harassment and assault plaguing society. Horrific acts of pedophilia and exploitation target children, young women and young men at the hands of workplace superiors, athletic coaches, teachers and, shamefully, religious figures.

Furthermore, experts consistently note that the vast majority of sexual abuse occurs within the family unit, perpetrated by fathers, grandfathers, uncles and brothers. Victims are frequently shamed into silence, carrying severe psychological trauma for years. It is this pervasive violence that demands the full scrutiny and force of the state, not the private lives of peaceful adults.

To conclude: Citizens with non-heterosexual orientations must accept that public space requires adherence to shared cultural norms. But in a civilized and just society, individuals of every sexual orientation have the right to live safely, free from state intrusion and public hostility.